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Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

Provisional

6100th meeting

Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Shalgham	(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Turkey	Mr. Ilkin
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Quarrey
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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09-27993 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, the Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Norway, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Qatar, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Shalev (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 23 March 2009 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2009/153 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Wednesday, 25 March 2009, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 March 2009 from His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, in which he requests to be invited, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Paul Badji.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations. At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Pascoe: Two months after unilateral ceasefires were declared in Gaza, we face a worrying situation of impasse and uncertainty. Despite international engagement and support, very little concrete progress has been made on key issues outlined in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). They include the establishment of a proper ceasefire regime in Gaza, unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance, opening of the crossings, prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, and intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Turning now to the more detailed part of the briefing, let me begin with Palestinian political

developments. Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad announced on 7 March his intention to resign at the end of the month, in order to bolster efforts to form a national conciliation government. President Mahmoud Abbas asked the Prime Minister to remain in office until the reconciliation dialogue was brought to a conclusion.

Between 10 and 19 March, Palestinian factions, as well as independents, assembled in Cairo under Egyptian auspices, with the goal of reaching agreement prior to the League of Arab States summit meeting to be held in Doha on 30 March. Egyptian officials report progress on certain aspects of the issues under discussion, namely the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), elections, government, security and reconciliation. However, the talks adjourned without an agreement and are expected to reconvene on 1 April. We reiterate our support for this process, as called for in resolution 1860 (2009).

Egypt hosted the International Conference on the Palestinian Economy and Gaza Reconstruction in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March. The Secretary-General joined representatives from some 80 countries and multilateral organizations in responding to the Palestinian Authority's Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan. Donors generously pledged some $4.5 billion for humanitarian and economic relief.

As he outlined at the Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Prime Minister Fayyad has initiated three large-scale interventions for Gaza's recovery process, aimed at rebuilding houses, agricultural development and private sector recovery. The United Nations supports the Palestinian Authority's relief and recovery efforts and continues to implement projects under the flash appeal, while simultaneously trying to restart projects dormant for many months prior to the military operation due to lack of material allowed in by Israel.

Discussions continue on convening the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in the near future. Key challenges to be addressed include the need for increased budget support for the Palestinian Authority, more clarity on how to channel the funds pledged in Sharm el-Sheikh for Gaza's recovery and on the need to address the overall framework for economic growth in the occupied Palestinian territory.

However, the intolerable situation at Gaza's crossings remains the key impediment to bringing help and hope to the people of Gaza. From 15 February to 21 March, a total of 3,633 truckloads — a weekly average of 727 — entered Gaza through the various crossing points from Israel and through Rafah. Roughly 85 per cent of all imports consisted of foodstuffs and medical supplies, whereas construction materials, spare parts and other industrial goods remained almost totally banned. While there has been an increase in the amount of goods getting into Gaza, and the Israeli Cabinet announced on 22 March that foodstuffs from relevant sources would be allowed into Gaza without restriction, the quality and quantity of imports are insufficient compared to needs. For that reason, the United Nations reiterates its call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and to open the crossings for emergency supplies and reconstruction materials, without which there will be no way to rebuild Gaza.

The quantity of industrial fuel and cooking gas is also insufficient, as only about 70 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, of the weekly needs enter Gaza. A total ban remains in place on the import of petrol and diesel, except for small quantities delivered to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

According to the International Monetary Fund, the continued restriction on the entry of cash and the inability of many, including Palestinian Authority employees, to withdraw salaries from the banks affect the livelihoods of approximately half a million Gazans. UNRWA and other international partners are unable to distribute cash assistance and to settle payments for social hardship cases.

We continue to be concerned that, despite Egyptian efforts, no ceasefire regime is in place. In addition, there has been no breakthrough in efforts to secure the release of Corporal Shalit and several hundred Palestinian prisoners, despite the intensification of efforts. Following an Israeli announcement on 17 March that agreement had not been reached, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) arrested 10 Hamas leaders in the West Bank, including a former deputy prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli Cabinet announced on 22 March its intention to remove privileges not mandated by legal requirements or treaty obligations from Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners.

In the absence of a ceasefire, violence continues. During the reporting period, more than 100 rockets and

mortars were fired into Israel from Gaza. Those attacks, targeting civilian areas, are irresponsible and must cease. In addition, there were 12 Israeli air strikes, killing five Palestinians and injuring 30. We call for an end to all acts of violence and for respect of international humanitarian law by all parties.

Four United Nations Mine Action Teams continue working in Gaza to remove and deactivate unexploded ordinance. One UNRWA and one municipal school have been cleared, along with the UNRWA warehouse at the Karni crossing. There has been no development regarding the return or identification of a new location of the ordinance, including several unexploded bombs that went missing in February 2009.

We are concerned by recent actions of the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza purporting to assert control over the Palestinian Authority Department of External Medical Treatment. If not reversed without delay, that step could prevent referrals from Gaza of patients needing urgent or complex medical care not available there.

The members of the Board of Inquiry into incidents in Gaza, established by the Secretary-General, have returned from the region and the Board is now working on its report. As the Council is aware, the Board was tasked to review and investigate a number of specific incidents that occurred in the Gaza Strip between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, in which death or injuries occurred or damage was done at United Nations premises. The Board will submit its report to the Secretary-General when he returns to New York in early April.

During the reporting period, a number of allegations emerged from Israel Defense Forces soldiers that they engaged in improper conduct towards civilians during Operation Cast Lead. On 19 March, the IDF Military Advocate General instructed the military police to probe those allegations.

Special Coordinator Serry is in Gaza today, and his consultations with business leaders and civil society representatives have underscored the desperate need for a new approach to Gaza based on a ceasefire, open crossings, rejuvenation of the private sector and Palestinian reconciliation. Without those, the many unresolved issues, combined with the absence of an active negotiations track and continued suffering, could portend a quick return to violence.

A new Israeli Government has yet to be formed following the elections for the Knesset last month. President Peres commissioned Likud party leader Binyamin Netanyahu to try to form a Government on 20 February, and Mr. Netanyahu remains engaged in intensive consultations with several parties to that end.

We continue to follow with concern negative actions on the ground in the West Bank, where insufficient steps are being taken to lift the weight of the occupation and to implement commitments. The rejection by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior of a planning scheme submitted by residents of the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem has given rise to concerns that it could pave the way for the demolition and building of a municipal park in a sensitive area of the city populated by more than 1,000 Palestinians. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities also served dozens of new orders for demolition and eviction, as well as against structures located in Area C of the West Bank which, if implemented, could affect hundreds of Palestinian residents throughout East Jerusalem. We call on the Government of Israel to stop house demolitions in East Jerusalem and generally to refrain from unilateral actions that may prejudge final status issues.

In the affected areas of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain building permits. Quartet Representative Tony Blair drew attention last week to the fact that, without changes in the current system applied to areas of the West Bank under full Israeli military and administrative control, Palestinians will be prevented from improving their standard of living and from developing their land.

Also in Jerusalem, on 21 March, Israeli security forces disrupted a Palestinian celebration marking East Jerusalem as a capital of Arab culture. Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order, and the construction of illegal settlements continues in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank. No action has been taken to remove outposts. Settlement activity, including in the highly sensitive E-1 area, continues to deprive Palestinians of land for development and agriculture and to create facts on the ground that severely prejudice final status issues.

The Ministry of Defence also approved construction plans for a settlement near Hebron. Let me reiterate before this Council that Israel's

obligations under the Road Map are clear. Settlement activity, including so-called natural growth, must be frozen and outposts must be removed.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, the more than 600 obstacles to movement continue to make normal social and economic interactions impossible for the Palestinian residents there. Construction of the barrier continued in the occupied Palestinian territory away from the Green Line, contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In the context of Palestinian Road Map obligations, Palestinian security forces remain highly visible in urban centres in the West Bank, prevent militants from conducting activities or displaying illegal weapons and continue their efforts to ensure law and order. However, no major operations or new deployments have taken place since reconciliation talks began in Cairo, and more than a hundred Hamas prisoners were released from Palestinian Authority jails as a goodwill gesture in the context of the reconciliation talks.

There have been some gradual improvements regarding cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian security forces, including the recent return of hundreds of rifles confiscated in 2002 and an easing of the closure regime in and around Nablus. Nevertheless, the IDF continues to raid West Bank towns and villages on a daily basis, citing security concerns. According to United Nations statistics, IDF operations in the West Bank have more than doubled in frequency since the end of the Gaza crisis, with nearly two hundred carried out during the reporting period.

Also during the reporting period, two Israeli policemen were killed by Palestinians in an attack in the Jordan Valley and two other policemen were injured in another attack in West Jerusalem. On 21 March, Israeli police reported that a large bomb had been found and defused in the car park of a shopping mall in Haifa. Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces, and 82 were injured. Most injuries occurred during protests against the barrier and against settlement expansion. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 26 incidents involving Israeli settlers targeting Palestinians, which resulted in seven injuries. Twenty-eight people were reportedly wounded in Israel on 24 March during clashes between police and demonstrators marching in the vicinity of the town of Umm al-Fahm.

The Secretary-General looks forward to attending the summit of the League of Arab States on 30 March and offers his encouragement for Arab unity in support of Palestinian unity under President Abbas and the central importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. In that respect, we take note that Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting with Syria, Egypt and Kuwait in Riyadh on 11 March aimed at strengthening ties within the Arab world and that participants agreed to support the Palestinian reconciliation process under way. The Secretary-General continues to support the holding of an international conference in Moscow in the near future.

During the reporting period, senior United States officials visited Damascus, and Syrian President Assad has indicated his country's readiness to renew indirect negotiations with a new Israeli Government. On the ground, settlement activity in the occupied Syrian Golan continued, although the situation was otherwise quiet. We continue to stress the importance and potential of Israeli-Syrian negotiations and hope that it will be possible in the year ahead to further that track, alongside a reinvigorated Israeli-Palestinian track.

I now turn to Lebanon. Mindful that the Special Coordinator for Lebanon briefed the Council on 10 March on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), I should just like to touch on a few issues.

On 23 March 2009, the relative calm that had prevailed in Lebanon for several weeks was interrupted when Kamal Medhat, Deputy PLO Representative in Lebanon and a high-ranking Fatah member, was killed by a roadside bomb outside the entrance to Saida's Mieh Mieh camp. In the explosion, three of Medhat's bodyguards were also killed and two other persons were severely injured. Palestinian as well as Lebanese political leaders have reached out to Palestinian faction leaders in the camps in an attempt to mitigate potential tensions on the ground. The Secretary-General has condemned that terrorist attack. He expressed his hope that the perpetrators of that crime will be promptly brought to justice and noted that such actions must not be allowed to endanger the climate of calm that currently prevails in Lebanon.

Campaigning for the 7 June elections has started, leading to increased political rhetoric among the

country's numerous political groups. Parties have yet to announce their electoral lists, but consultations on candidates are under way. Candidates have until 7 April to register.

A fifth session of the national dialogue, bringing together Lebanon's 14 main political leaders, took place on 2 March under the aegis of President Sleiman. Participants agreed to develop proposals for a national defence strategy. It was also agreed at the dialogue that all parties will work to ensure that the elections are conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. A further session of the dialogue is planned for 28 April.

A ceremony took place on 9 March to mark the start of reconstruction in the Nahr el-Bared camp. Securing adequate funding to complete the work remains an issue of major importance.

On 16 March, the Lebanese embassy in Syria was inaugurated. The Lebanese Ambassador to Syria will take up his post in mid-April. On 24 March, Lebanese President Sleiman accepted the credentials of the newly appointed Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon. Those appointments come at a timely juncture and are welcome developments that fulfil one of the key provisions of Security Council resolution 1680 (2006).

The overall situation during the month in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has been generally quiet. Progress on the project of visibly marking the Blue Line continued to be made this month, with four additional points having been agreed for marking. Israeli air violations continued on an almost daily basis during the reporting period.

It is important that the Quartet and the international community act with unity of purpose to help stabilize Gaza and reinvigorate the peace process. We need to have both Israeli and Palestinian Governments that are clearly committed to the two-State solution. We need a continuation of negotiations, the implementation of commitments on the ground and a strategy for de-escalating tensions and addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your new post as Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and wish you every success. I also congratulate you and your sisterly country on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. We are fully confident of your ability to wisely guide the Council's work. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Japan for his skilled and outstanding leadership of the Council last month. In addition, I wish to express our appreciation to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing.

Since the Council's most recent open debate on this item (*see S/PV.6061*), following the monthly briefing in December 2008, we have witnessed a dramatic deterioration on all fronts in the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In spite of the guarded optimism that we expressed during that debate, which following the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) — which, inter alia, reaffirmed the commitment to the two-State solution, declared support for the peace negotiations launched at Annapolis in November 2007 and reaffirmed their irreversibility — we are now at a juncture in which peace seems more remote than ever and the situation on the ground has become even more volatile.

As we are all aware, resolution 1850 (2008) was the first resolution adopted by the Council on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in more than four and a half years, despite Israel's systematic violations of international law and United Nations resolutions in the occupied Palestinian territory, which only strengthened Israel's impunity and lawlessness and hastened the deterioration of the situation. Thus, shortly after the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), and instead of implementing measures to build the confidence and trust necessary for peacebuilding, we bore witness yet again to Israel's blatant disrespect for the Council, the peace process and all legal norms, demonstrated by its savage war against the Gaza Strip, launched in disregard for all standards of military conduct and human decency and with disastrous humanitarian and political consequences.

That brutal and merciless military aggression against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population ravaged a tiny area that was already gravely deprived

and suffering as a result of years of the unlawful Israeli blockade. We are all aware by now of the human and physical tolls of destruction deliberately inflicted by the occupying Power during that three-week aggression, the magnitude of which was unprecedented since the occupation began in 1967.

A final tally of the casualties of the Israeli aggression reveals that more than 1,400 Palestinians were killed. The overwhelming majority of these were civilians, including hundreds of children and women, while more than 5,500 Palestinians, including more than 1,800 children, were injured. I have with me a photograph of one of those children. Many sustained permanent injuries and maiming as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and lethal use of force, which included prohibited weaponry and ammunition used by the occupying forces against the civilian population.

The physical toll of destruction wantonly caused by Israel in the Gaza Strip is equally immense. Billions of dollars will be required to rebuild Gaza, where the occupying Power damaged or completely destroyed more than 21,000 homes and refugee shelters; thousands of business properties, including agricultural farmlands; vital civilian infrastructure, including water, sanitation and electricity systems; and roads, hospitals, ambulances, mosques, schools, national institutions and several United Nations facilities.

The horrifying facts have become all too clear, so I will not dwell on the details. However, I wish to take a moment to urge a closer look at the human side of this tragedy. We must stop perceiving the killing of civilians in armed conflict as simply a silence that is associated with death. Only when we begin to understand the maddening and destructive force that defines killing can we begin to understand the depth of the trauma, anguish and suffering inflicted on a people forced to endure such military assaults without a safe place to hide or to flee to. The deafening cries and paralysing screams of fear and pain of the children, women and men killed and wounded and of their shattered, terrorized families — those were the real sights, sounds and core of a war in which no distinction was made between combatants and civilians.

I had the honour of being in Cairo two weeks ago as part of a delegation from the Palestine Committee of the United Nations. We visited a hospital in Cairo and saw with our own eyes dozens of injured Palestinians. One of them was the child depicted in the photograph I have here. We took that photograph with Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. This child's name is Mahmoud Haani, and he caused the international delegation to weep when he told us his story. He asked us to take a message in the name of the thousands of martyrs and wounded, and he asked us to pose a question to Israel, the occupying Power: "Why did you cause me to lose my eyesight and to ruin my future? I am a child and only 12 years old. My name is Mahmoud Haani." I have conveyed his message to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, and every person with a conscience is responsible for holding accountable the criminals who carried out these crimes and for ensuring that they face the justice they so deserve.

The task of recovery has now begun, including attempts to heal the wounds of families whose lives have been shattered and forever altered by the brutal attack and who must cope not only with grief and loss — and, for many, renewed displacement — but who must also struggle to survive under the deplorable living conditions caused by the ongoing illegal Israeli blockade, which constitutes collective punishment of the entire population. The situation is as abnormal and unstable as can be imagined.

We are fully cognizant of the short- and long-term consequences of this crisis and know that the road ahead as we rebuild and heal our society will be extremely difficult. Not only funding, but monumental efforts will be needed to help repair the physical, psychological and societal damage and to achieve a just resolution of the conflict that will fulfil the rights and needs of the Palestinian people to freedom and human dignity in their homeland after decades of loss, oppression, statelessness and suffering.

Nevertheless, we reiterate our appreciation to all countries and organizations throughout the world that are supporting the recovery and reconstruction of Gaza, including those that participated in the donor conference at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. In that connection, we extend our thanks and appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt for generously hosting that important conference. We are deeply grateful for the outpouring of solidarity and generous support for our people. Moreover, we thank the United Nations and all of its agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, which in all circumstances have continued to provide invaluable assistance to the Palestinian people in all

fields, particularly emergency health care and food sustenance, aimed at alleviating the humanitarian crisis.

While addressing humanitarian needs, we must also focus on other issues necessary for stabilizing and restoring some normalcy to Gaza. The achievement of a permanent, durable ceasefire is one such priority. At the same time, the inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza must be lifted to end the imprisonment of our people. The immediate long-term opening of all border crossings is imperative and must allow for the import of all essential supplies, including sufficient food, medicine and fuel, as well as building supplies necessary for reconstruction and other goods and commercial flows necessary for economic recovery.

If Israel continues the punitive blockade on the movement of persons and goods into and out of Gaza, it will only ensure an increase in the poverty, despair, indignation and frustration of the Palestinian people and the peoples of the region.

In addition, serious steps must be taken to pursue accountability for Israel's crimes against the Palestinian civilian population. We reiterate our calls to the international community, including the Security Council, to investigate the grave breaches of international law committed by the occupying forces in Gaza, bearing in mind, inter alia, articles 146, 147 and 148 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. All crimes, including the wilful killing of civilians, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, must be investigated and the perpetrators must be prosecuted.

Our consciences will not allow these barbaric war crimes against our people to go unpunished. Evidence continues to be collected, and all options are being explored. The Palestinian leadership has taken initial steps in this regard and will continue to act responsibly and collectively by all appropriate means, including through the Security Council, to ensure that the law is upheld and justice is served. We will thus work diligently to follow up the findings of the Secretary-General's board of inquiry, of the fact-finding commission to be dispatched by the Human Rights Council and of any other relevant investigations being carried out.

In this connection, I refer to the important letter recently conveyed to the Secretary-General and Security Council from prominent individuals in the field of international justice and reconciliation of conflict, calling for the establishment of a United Nations commission of inquiry to investigate all serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during the Gaza conflict. As stated by the distinguished signatories:

(*spoke in English*)

> "We have seen at first hand the importance of investigating the truth and delivering justice for the victims of conflict and believe it is a precondition to move forward and achieve peace in the Middle East."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Indeed, only in this way can we seek to end Israel's impunity, prevent the recurrence of such crimes and progress towards securing a just and lasting peace and coexistence between the two peoples.

While the human misery and hardship quotient in the Gaza Strip has risen to intolerable levels, the situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, also remains volatile. Israel continues its military raids and arrest operations in the West Bank, adding daily to the thousands of imprisoned Palestinians, including children, women and elected officials, whose release we continue to demand. Also, and of particularly grave concern, is Israel's ongoing settler colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, which it is pursuing in grave breach and defiance of international law, United Nations resolutions and the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, and in total contradiction to the objectives and spirit of the peace process.

In letter after letter, statement after statement — including the statement by President Mahmoud Abbas at the Council's special meeting on 26 September 2008 to specifically address this issue (*see S/PV.5983*) — we have drawn attention to this unlawful campaign and cautioned about its destructive impact on the situation on the ground and on the peace process. We have repeatedly appealed to the Council to uphold its responsibilities and act to compel the occupying Power to comply with its legal obligations and bring to an immediate halt all settlement activities and all acts of settler terrorism and violence against the Palestinian people. Regrettably, the lack of action and Israel's

refusal to respect international law have created a tense and dangerous situation on the ground and completely undermined the peace process.

Even during the peace process, this massive colonization campaign has never ceased. In fact, in the period since the Annapolis conference, it has multiplied 17-fold. I repeat, settlement activities have multiplied 17-fold, at a minimum. The illegal campaign to expropriate Palestinian land continues, as do efforts to carry out a de facto annexation. For this purpose, Israel continues the expansion of settlements and settlement outposts; the construction of settlement infrastructure; the transfer of thousands more Israeli settlers to the occupied territory; the construction of bypass roads and of the wall; the imposition of a racist permit regime, residency restrictions and hundreds of checkpoints; demolitions of Palestinian homes; and excavations, all of which are particularly intense in and around occupied East Jerusalem.

Indeed, the situation in and around East Jerusalem is most critical, as Israel continues to de-populate the city of its Palestinian inhabitants while simultaneously promoting its Judaization by all of the aforementioned unlawful actions, including in the area of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Old City. The character and physical landscape of the city continues to be changed by the occupying Power, including through measures to isolate it from the rest of the West Bank. In addition to non-stop settler colonization, Israel also continues to impose a closure on Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem and to obstruct Palestinian cultural events and development in the city, including the prevention of recent events in connection with the celebration of "Jerusalem: Capital of Arab Culture 2009".

While the Security Council and General Assembly have repeatedly declared such measures unlawful and null and void, more is needed at this critical juncture than declarations and statements. Action must be taken to halt all Israeli colonization measures aimed at illegally and unilaterally determining the fate of the city, for there can be no peace without East Jerusalem — the capital and heart of the future Palestinian State.

The intent of all such illegal measures and practices by Israel is clear: it is to dramatically alter the demographic composition, character, geographic nature and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to entrench its presence on the land in order to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations in the peace process in Israel's favour.

On the ground, such flagrant breaches continue to affect all aspects of Palestinian life, undermine the territory's contiguity, integrity and unity, and inflame tensions. The separation, isolation and cantonization of Palestinian communities by the settlements, the separation wall and the checkpoints, which can only be likened to apartheid and segregation, are gravely affecting these communities and destroying their societal fabric. In the peace process, these provocative, illegal Israeli actions have undermined the drive for peace, poisoning the atmosphere between the two sides and tainting the process as a whole, calling into question Israel's commitment to the process and credibility as a "partner for peace".

Colonization and the peace process cannot coexist. Israel's settlement activities are totally contradictory to the peace process and the core principle of land for peace sustaining it. This illegitimate policy has repeatedly damaged the peace process and is physically destroying the prospects for achieving the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the 1967 borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the peace process — on which there is international consensus — and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We thus reaffirm that continuing negotiations under such conditions would be futile and unacceptable. A process under such conditions will never achieve its goal of two States living side by side in peace and security. The Palestinian leadership has always negotiated in good faith, but we cannot continue blindly in this process while Israel destroys all chances for the realization of our legitimate national aspirations.

The international community, including the Quartet, the main sponsor of the peace process, must realize that continued declarations or mild appeals to Israel will no longer suffice. More of the same will not change this grave situation and, worse still, further appeasement will only deepen the problem. In the face of continued defiance, real and serious action, including practical measures, by the Quartet and the international community as a whole is required to bring an end to such destructive and unlawful Israeli

practices, which jeopardize the viability of the future independent State of Palestine and the prospects for peace and stability in our region.

Israel, the occupying Power, must be compelled to cease immediately all settlement and related colonization activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and abide by its obligations under international law in that regard, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Moreover, demands must be made upon Israel to clearly affirm its respect for its Road Map obligations and other peace process commitments in both word and deed, to freeze, all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, and to dismantle the outposts.

In this regard, we express serious concern about the shift to the far right of the new Israeli Government and over rhetoric and positions that totally contradict the two-State solution for peace, the Quartet principles and the peace process itself. The new Israeli position, inter alia, calls for the expansion of settlements, rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab State and insists on full control over Jerusalem, indicating an intention to vigorously pursue Jewish habitation there in order to assert Israeli control over the eastern parts of the city. We therefore emphasize that demands must be made upon Israel to not only talk of peace, but to actually act for peace, just as the Palestinian leadership has done over the past 15 years since the start of the peace process, including by upholding its Road Map obligations.

In this connection and in closing, I wish to make a brief reference to the status of Palestinian reconciliation efforts. Despite the stall in the talks mediated by Egypt, we remain hopeful of achieving unification of the Palestinian political factions in order to strengthen our efforts in pursuit of our just national cause, which continues to confront so many challenges. Arrangements are being made for a transitional Government and elections and to address other priority issues. We reaffirm our intention to work hard and seriously to heal the divisions and to achieve the national unity so vital to the achievement of our legitimate national rights.

In this regard, we urge the international community, particularly after having witnessed the disastrous ramifications of recent years, to engage diplomatically with a unified, representative Palestinian leadership. That is imperative in order to allow us together to address, with coordinated and serious action, the many urgent issues we currently face and to advance the overall goal of a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I would like to acknowledge the presence of Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and thank him for his informative briefing.

Our region is at an important juncture that may determine the future of the Middle East for some time to come. There is much reason for optimism, but also cause for concern. In the Middle East, moderates are working towards peace. These are the true partners in building a secure future for the region. In contrast, there are also extremists who use every opportunity to sabotage progress made and seek to destroy good will, hopes and aspirations on all sides. Among these are the Hamas and Hizbollah terrorist organizations, led, supported, harboured, financed and trained by their Iranian and Syrian patrons. Many would agree. Iran continues to threaten to wipe Israel off the map, and its development of nuclear capabilities should sound alarms across the globe. Iran is indeed the real danger to our region, the world and the future.

Let me state in no uncertain terms that Israel is committed to the peace process. However, the peace process must be based, among other things, on the three clear principles set out by the Quartet and the international community: recognition of the State of Israel, renunciation of terrorism and violence, and adherence to previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. Any future Palestinian Government must therefore abide by the same basic conditions, which are fundamental to any relationship between peoples. Lasting peace can be forged only on solid foundations of mutual respect and recognition between leaders, peoples and societies.

Relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority continue to advance in real terms and in a number of areas. In the economic realm, overall domestic production in the West Bank increased by 5 per cent in 2008 and trade with Israel increased by

over a third. In addition, over $1.76 billion in aid was distributed in the West Bank in 2008 — an increase of 74 per cent over the previous year — showing an increase in international confidence in the management of the Palestinian economy. Israel recently removed about 10 roadblocks and 130 temporary barriers in the West Bank. Among these, one particular road, from which a roadblock was removed just recently, remains open in spite of the ruthless murder by terrorists, nine days ago, of two Israeli police officers. As mentioned already, a few days ago, an extremely dangerous car bomb was found and defused at the entrance to a shopping mall in the city of Haifa, preventing catastrophic consequences and the loss of many lives. Meanwhile, the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority have increased their security cooperation in an effort to improve the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians.

These positive developments, and others, are proof that confidence-building steps, taken by those who cherish a genuine desire for progress, can bring the parties closer to their common goal.

In contrast, the situation in Gaza remains problematic. Since 18 January, over 100 rockets and 60 mortars have been launched into Israel from Gaza, including a Qassam rocket that landed near the coastal city of Asheklon just yesterday. As we have stated before, Israel will not tolerate a return to the status quo ante, with continued terrorist attacks jeopardizing civilians throughout the southern part of my country. Israel's obligation was, is and will continue to be to safeguard the security of its citizens.

Let me turn for a minute to the Palestinian Permanent Observer. I would like to say that, indeed, civilians on both sides, including children, unfortunately bear the burden of the conflict. I could tell the story of the children of Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdot, who are also asking themselves and their parents why more than 1,000 rockets were fired at them, preventing them from living a normal life — and this, after Israel fully withdrew from Gaza. For example, the child Osher Tuito, who was a successful football player and lost his leg from a Qassam, is asking those questions every day after he had to move from Ashdot to Ashkelon, where he is still exposed to Qassam rockets. Indeed, each side has stories to tell. Let us not use those stories — except only to advance and try to unite in order to achieve peace for our peoples.

Unfortunately, some actors in the region continue to give direct support to Hamas in Gaza, by various attempts and through various venues, providing it with offensive capabilities. The use of tunnels under Gaza's southern border is ongoing. The danger remains. While we are encouraged by the willingness of members of the international community to tackle the smuggling of military capabilities, as witnessed at the recent London conference, tangible measures must immediately be taken against smuggling, as only concrete action will help to stabilize the region.

Let me remind this important Council that Corporal Gilad Shalit continues to be held hostage by terrorists. This is a dire humanitarian problem. Four days ago we marked 1,000 days and nights since his unlawful, criminal detention in June 2006. During this time, all access to him has been denied. Defying all standards of decency and humanity, Hamas has been attempting to cruelly manipulate the hearts and minds of the Israeli people, raising the price of his release during negotiations. Hamas is exploiting in a most cynical way Israel's sensitivity for human life and the moral values demonstrated throughout the years by the Government of Israel and its people.

It is worth remembering that in the military operation that ended in January, the true targets of Israeli actions were Hamas terrorists, not the citizens of Gaza. Ordinary Gazans were used as human shields by Hamas, who deliberately staged attacks from, and hid in, heavily populated civilian areas.

In spite of the ongoing attacks from Gaza, and despite Israel's commitment to its crucial security needs, we are not indifferent to the humanitarian situation of Gaza's population. More than 140,000 tons of humanitarian supplies and 13.5 million litres of fuel for Gaza's power station have been delivered into the Gaza Strip since 18 January. That amounts to an average of 140 trucks per day entering Gaza. However, let me state clearly Israel's position: expanded activity at the crossings will be discussed upon the release of Gilad Shalit.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, while we recognize the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in southern Lebanon, more needs to be done to ensure the continued stability of the area. Israel recently witnessed the most serious violations of resolution 1701 (2006) since it was adopted. Rockets

were fired from Lebanon into Israel, wounding civilians. During the past several months, UNIFIL and the LAF have discovered a number of other rockets, preventing them from also being launched against my country. These developments should be cause for great concern to States that desire regional tranquillity.

For years, Israel has been alerting the Security Council to Hizbullah's ongoing military build-up in southern Lebanon. This terrorist organization, backed and supported by Iran and Syria, continues to increase its presence and strength in the area, using private homes and other civilian property for its activities.

Thus, Israel joins the international community in its call for robust action against arms smuggling along the Syrian-Lebanese border, in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team II, transmitted by the Secretary-General in document S/2008/582.

This is a time of great flux in the Middle East. Radicals are competing with moderates for domination. There is no better time than today for the international community to show its support for moderate voices and to assert its resolute opposition to terrorists and those who support them. We ask Member States to add their vocal and tangible support in the quest for a durable peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now give the floor to members of the Council.

Mr. Rugunda (Uganda): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on the Middle East.

Uganda welcomes the briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, which we believe presents an opportunity for United Nations Members to gauge overall progress and help focus on the way forward. We note from the briefing that limited progress has been recorded since the briefing given in January 2009 (see S/PV.6077).

The relative peace and quiet that has characterized the last few weeks is encouraging. The regrettable incidents reported by Mr. Pascoe are a reminder to us all that the momentum for peace must be sustained and consolidated in order to find a lasting solution to the problem of the Middle East. We commend Egypt and other partners for the role they have played and continue to play in mediating ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas. Uganda welcomes the appointment of a number of special envoys to the Middle East and is encouraged that most of them have already started their work in the region.

However, the situation still remains fragile. We are concerned about the reports of intermittent hostilities that continue to disrupt the peace. There is need for a durable and fully respected ceasefire as envisioned in resolution 1860 (2009). But that ceasefire will always remain temporary if it is not accompanied by sustained efforts to find a political settlement in the Middle East.

Uganda is convinced that a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be achieved only through negotiations among the parties concerned. It is of concern that the divisions that exist among the Palestinian groups continue to weaken the negotiation efforts. We therefore commend efforts by Egypt and others for the work done to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

As we have heard, the situation in Gaza remains precarious. The humanitarian situation and reconstruction demands following the disastrous war early this year still pose a huge challenge. Because of the blockade, the overall levels of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza remain below what is urgently required. The socio-economic infrastructure remains in shambles. We note from the briefing that during the violence many lives were lost and much property destroyed and that the war has caused enormous suffering that is still being experienced even today.

Uganda therefore welcomes the outcome of the international aid conference for Gaza and its reconstruction that was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, where $4.5 billion was pledged. We call on all those countries and organizations that made pledges to honour them.

However, even with the pledged money coming in, dealing with the humanitarian situation and the reconstruction efforts will require that Israel completely lift the blockade in order to facilitate easier humanitarian access. Furthermore, all Palestinians will have to work together to implement the recovery and reconstruction plans.

With regard to Lebanon, we note that the security situation in south Lebanon has been relatively calm in recent months. We welcome the progress made in the

normalization of relations between Lebanon and its neighbours. We also welcome the proposed 7 June parliamentary elections in Lebanon and call on all parties to ensure calm and stability during the electoral period.

Despite the limited progress, we are concerned that the ceasefire is not fully implemented, in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006). In this connection, we call upon Israel and Lebanon to respect the ceasefire. Uganda commends the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and all humanitarian agencies that, despite the very difficult circumstances, continue to provide relief assistance to the people caught in this conflict.

Finally, Uganda will continue to support all the parties in the Middle East in their efforts to achieve comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and other relevant Council resolutions.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Let me start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his extensive briefing. Let me also underline that Turkey also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

The tragic events at the start of this year have further complicated the political, humanitarian and socio-economic aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The recent hostilities devastated Gaza, with a heavy death toll of over one thousand lives, mostly women and children. The Palestinians in Gaza are now faced with formidable suffering and hardship. As indicated by the latest report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), growing numbers of Gazans live in extreme poverty, and the numbers of the unemployed keep rising.

On the other hand, Israeli citizens living in the cities adjacent to Gaza should also feel safe and secure. Rocket attacks launched from Gaza have been a constant threat to them.

Time will not, in itself, heal all wounds. Active engagement by the international community is imperative in dressing them. In this context, we are encouraged by the amount of pledges and the level of participation at Sharm el-Sheikh earlier this month, where the international community reiterated its full support for the two-State solution and expressed its expectation for strong commitment on the part of all sides to such a settlement.

In addition to $150 million pledged in Paris in 2007, Turkey announced in Sharm el-Sheikh another contribution of $50 million for specific reconstruction projects in Gaza. Moreover, voluntary contributions of the Turkish people to various donation accounts opened for Gaza have reached almost $50 million. This amount will also be used for reconstruction projects in Gaza.

However, we cannot possibly speak of the reconstruction of Gaza and the return to daily life until the blockade completely ends and the crossings open. There can be no improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians unless restrictions on the movement of people and goods are lifted, not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank. Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) clearly underlines the need for the comprehensive opening of crossings. That resolution should be fully implemented. We must also ensure that the ceasefire is sustainable and respected by all.

We are increasingly concerned about Israel's ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Turkey has repeatedly made it clear that settlement-building, which is contrary to Road Map commitments and the two-State solution, is wrong and should stop. None of the parties should take any action that would undermine the peace process and prejudge the final status negotiations. This also applies to the Palestinian factions.

In the aftermath of the unfortunate events, securing Palestinian reconciliation and unity once again becomes an issue of critical importance and urgency. We commend President Abbas for his tireless efforts to achieve that vital goal. The Palestinian cause would be best served if the Palestinian factions settle their differences and join hands. That is a must in order to keep alive and to realize the aspiration for an independent Palestinian State representing all Palestinians. We maintain our contacts with and guidance to different Palestinian groups in this direction.

Turkey is also committed to the empowerment of the Palestinian Authority in the context of the State-building process. We will continue with our

contributions to strengthen the Palestinian Authority and its institutions and economy.

It is an undeniable fact that Israel's need for peace, prosperity and security is best served by a strong and united Palestinian State living side by side with Israel. The Israelis and Palestinians are bound to live next to one another. They can do so either as combatants or as good neighbours and friends. It is high time that they make the right choice.

We have always emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to the issues, since the problems of the region are all interlinked.

We are ready to assist once again in order to achieve the resumption of the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, if the parties so desire.

We welcome the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria and the reciprocal appointment of ambassadors. We are also encouraged by the current American engagement with Syria.

We believe that the forthcoming elections in Lebanon will be an important step in taking the Lebanese people towards a better and brighter future, consolidating the positive developments in the country. We have confidence in the wisdom of the people of Lebanon, that they will not miss this opportunity. For its part, Turkey will remain committed to contribute to the stability of Lebanon through its participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and, through its reconstruction projects, to the prosperity of that country.

We will continue to work for a viable and comprehensive peace on all tracks of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. I welcome and thank the delegations of Palestine and Israel for their participation in this debate of the Council. We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The serious engagement of Palestinian factions over the past month in a dialogue process mediated by Egypt has led to the establishment of five committees that are working on national reconciliation issues, the successful outcome of the Cairo international conference on the reconstruction of Gaza and the further efforts of the Palestinian Authority to improve socio-economic rehabilitation and reconstruction, especially in the face of the devastating global financial crisis.

These developments, however, remain overshadowed by the extent and scope of the challenges that persist in the region. We condemn Israel's continued military activities and bombardments, its ongoing construction of the separation wall and its expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank. In the same vein, we condemn rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.

Already pauperized by an 18-month blockade and a tight regime of closures and restrictions on movements that date back to the early 1990s, the Palestinian population in Gaza has been driven to the limit of human suffering by the unprecedented aggravation and hardship in the aftermath of the war. The recent events in Gaza only further prove that violence will not and can never be a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. At this politically delicate juncture, pending the formation of a new Government in Israel and the outcome of reconciliation efforts among Palestinian factions, we call upon all the parties concerned to opt for peaceful rather than military means for settling their disputes and to desist from any action that is detrimental to innocent civilians and to the process of negotiations towards a two-State solution to the conflict.

We underline the pressing need for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), especially with regard to a durable, lasting and fully respected ceasefire, the opening of border crossings and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. In that connection, the role played by the United Nations, the League of Arab States and countries of the region remains essential.

We support collective efforts aimed at addressing the heavy casualties and damage to the physical life and psychological well-being of the Palestinian people and the immediate post-conflict needs of affected families, as well as at facilitating long-term recovery and reconstruction in Gaza. We commend United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and other humanitarian organizations for their bravery in rendering emergency assistance to Gazans, and we urge the parties concerned to extend

the fullest cooperation in facilitating humanitarian activities.

We urge all parties concerned to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws in all circumstances. In this connection, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to dispatch the board of inquiry to Gaza, and we look forward to the report on the results of its investigation.

A lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East cannot be disassociated from concurrent progress on other, related tracks. We note the steps taken by the Government of Lebanon to assert full authority over its territory, strengthen the country's political stability and socio-economic development and normalize relations with countries of the region. We join the Secretary-General in condemning the recent terrorist attack against PLO personnel in Lebanon and request that the culprits be brought to justice. We call upon all parties in Lebanon to refrain from violence, build on the general momentum of national unity and reconciliation created since the signing of Doha Agreement, in May 2008, and concentrate their efforts on ensuring that the parliamentary elections scheduled for 7 June 2009 are conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner.

While reiterating our support for the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we stress the imperative for all parties concerned to work together to peacefully tackle such outstanding issues as Israel's intensified air violations of Lebanese territory and its continued occupation of the northern part of the village of al-Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, the unresolved status of Shaba'a farms and the environmental contamination and civilian casualties due to Israel's failure to provide the technical strike data on the cluster munitions and landmines used earlier by its forces.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): We welcome this open meeting of the Security Council. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

On 16 December 2008, the Security Council held a ministerial-level meeting on the question of the Middle East (6045th meeting) and adopted resolution 1850 (2008), demonstrating its support for political talks between Palestine and Israel and their efforts to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. The meeting also indicated the international community's expectations for the peaceful coexistence of two States, Palestine and Israel.

However, just 11 days following the adoption of the resolution, the situation in the Middle East experienced precipitous changes. Beginning on 27 December, Israel carried out military actions against the Gaza Strip that lasted more than 20 days and resulted in heavy casualties among Palestinian civilians and enormous loss of property. The Middle East peace process was thus severely tested and suffered a major setback. China wishes to reaffirm that we oppose any attempt to solve disputes through military means, as well as any act of violence targeting civilians.

The current situation in the Middle East remains tense and fragile. The Palestinian and Israeli sides have not yet reached a lasting ceasefire agreement, and hostilities and acts of violence still occur. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is a cause for concern. The reconstruction process is beset by difficulties. The plight of the Palestinian people on the West Bank of the Jordan River is also worrisome.

There are still multiple uncertain factors vis-à-vis the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel. We appeal to the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint, renounce violence and military means and refrain from any action that may exacerbate the tension. We urge Israel, the occupying Power, to open the border crossings, stop building settlements on the West Bank and allow the Palestinian people to enjoy normal and dignified lives. We are concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people and appeal to the international community to continue to provide humanitarian, development, technical and other kinds of assistance to Palestine.

We believe that, given the tense and fragile Middle East situation, the international community should focus its efforts on the following four areas.

First, the security situation should be consolidated in order to push for a durable ceasefire. The parties concerned should fully implement in good faith resolution 1860 (2009), adopted on 8 January, so as to reach a comprehensive and durable ceasefire arrangement as soon as possible. In this context, the international community must support the efforts undertaken by Egypt and other countries.

Secondly, the commitments for assistance for the reconstruction of the Gaza strip must be honoured in

order to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground. We welcome the positive outcome of the pledging conference held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March and we appeal to the international community to translate the commitments made into concrete actions. Israel must open the border crossings and ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and the materials necessary for reconstruction. At the same time, we expect the Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General to give a timely report to the Security Council on the findings of its investigations.

Thirdly, there must be a push for intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is of critical importance to safeguard the Palestinian people's interests and the resumption of the Middle East peace process. We appeal to the various Palestinian factions to engage in sincere talks and resolve their differences.

Fourthly, there must be an expeditious resumption of the Middle East peace process. We have always maintained that political talks are the only correct avenue leading to durable peace in the Middle East. The Security Council should support the Palestinian-Israeli negotiation process in a more proactive manner, and in particular ensure that the relevant resolutions of the Security Council are respected and implemented. We hope that the Quartet will play an even greater role and push for a resumption of political talks between Palestine and Israel on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, so as to fulfil as soon as possible the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, coexisting in peace.

China stands ready to work with the international community and will continue to play a constructive role in favour of an early proper settlement of the Middle East question and the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like to begin by thank you and your delegation for holding a large number of public meetings. We believe that in the eyes of the membership of the Organization, this is a healthy practice. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for the briefing he gave us and to welcome the presence of the representatives of Israel and Palestine.

The last time that the Council debated the situation in the Middle East, the population of Gaza was experiencing dramatic days. Today, we face a different scenario, characterized by relative calm. Despite that, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is still deplorable, and my delegation must once again condemn the terrorist attacks against the territory of Israel and the air attacks on Gaza.

In this context, we recognize the importance of acts of solidarity with the affected peoples, especially the intervention of Egypt which little by little has contributed to reducing tensions and has played a fundamental role in reaching the first agreements.

For Costa Rica, the humanitarian situation in Gaza calls for particular attention. A high percentage of the population there depends on humanitarian assistance. The United Nations must have all the facilities needed to provide humanitarian assistance and to carry out its programmes with no obstructions. Besides that, Gaza's reconstruction and normalization of life for its population are of great importance to us.

The National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza presented by the Palestinian Government is a general framework to reactivate the Gaza economy, which should guide the actions of the international community. In this context, the commitments made during the Sharm el-Sheikh conference of 2 March are a major contribution towards the reconstruction of the territory, which has lost 14 per cent of its infrastructure and 75 per cent of its arable land.

However, the beneficial effects of these contributions for the reconstruction of Gaza will not translate into sustainable results as long as the negotiations are not resumed and as long as no concrete agreements are reached on substantive issues, leading to permanent political solutions, including a permanent ceasefire.

Today it is important to call once again for full respect by the parties for their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law. Accordingly, normalization of border crossings is a major objective. Although there has been an improvement in the entry of basic necessities in recent weeks, the levels of goods entering Gaza are still much lower than those of July 2008. The levels of humanitarian assistance continue to be far lower than what is urgently needed.

The opening of the crossings is vital, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 2 of resolution 1860 (2009). It is also important to put a halt to the illicit traffic of weapons and ammunition and to prevent them from entering Gaza freely. Costa Rica is pleased welcomes the international agreement signed on 13 March in London by representatives of nine countries, in which an action plan was established to respond to the ongoing concerns about the smuggling of arms into Gaza.

Costa Rica is also concerned at each new settlement built in occupied Palestinian territories. The Council should stress the need to put an end to the continued expansion of illegal settlements. We are not unaware of, and the new Government of Israel should not ignore, the broad consensus in the international community on the need to put a halt to the growth of illegal settlements that go against the commitments that have been made.

Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is of great importance for the return to a peace process in which all Palestinian political actors will take part. It is imperative for Palestinian factions to find common ground, which will make it possible for them to work in a constructive fashion and provide their people with the hope for a life lived in peace and safety.

We know that, among the efforts to improve the situation in the Middle East, those being made by the League of Arab States are decisive. We hope that, at the coming Doha summit, there will be strengthened initiatives to reach lasting peace in the region, leading to the consolidation of an independent Palestinian State, the strengthening of Israel's security and creative coexistence benefiting both peoples.

Costa Rica commends the efforts of the Secretary-General to mandate the Board of Inquiry to investigate the incidents that affected United Nations personnel and installations in Gaza during the recent conflict, and we hope to receive its results in the near future. We believe it important for the credibility of our Organization that all acts of hostility against United Nations installations and its personnel be investigated and that the responsibility for such acts be assigned.

We hope that the Security Council will be part of the solution leading to a last peace between Israel and Palestine and to an environment of peace in the Middle East. The international community must continue to show its commitment by supporting the parties and facilitating their goal of reaching a permanent solution to the conflict and of two States coexisting in peace and security. To that end, we call for fulfilment of the commitments adopted in the peace process on the basis of the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the resolutions of this Council and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Similarly, we recognize the work of all agencies and organizations of the United Nations, in particular that of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on the Middle East peace process. We agree with the main assessments that he presented to us. We were interested to hear the statements of the Permanent Observer of Palestine and of the Permanent Representative of Israel.

Today, the international community must think about how to provide new impetus to the search for peace in the Middle East. The impasse in that area undermines efforts to stabilize the situation in the region. Much will depend on how the Government of Israel conducts itself following the election of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. We are convinced that negotiations with the Palestinians must not be resumed from scratch; they should be pursued taking all previous achievements and agreements into account. The main thing is to ensure that the new Israeli Cabinet stays the course of settling the crisis on the basis of the concept of a two-State solution and resolves itself to the necessity of freezing settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem.

Strengthening the fragile ceasefire in Gaza, making it stable and reciprocal, and further action to restore a fully fledged peace process are urgent tasks. We cannot allow a recurrence of the tragedy of the peaceful inhabitants of Gaza, where thousands of people, including children, fell victims of the violence. It is also necessary to free the citizens of southern Israel from the permanent threat of rocket attacks on their homes. The best way to do that is for all sides fully to implement resolution 1860 (2009).

Clearly, it is important to ensure the implementation of resolution 1850 (2008), which supports a comprehensive peace process in the Middle East. The efforts of Egypt in that regard are of key importance. The international community must continue energetically to support them and we cherish

the hope that its mediation activities will be successful. The donor conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, at which the international community expressed its readiness to pledge more funds than expected for the recovery of Gaza, contributed positively to that end. For its part, Russia will continue to provide the Palestinians with all necessary assistance.

The recent conflict in Gaza has again demonstrated the importance of an intra-Palestinian reconciliation on a mutually acceptable legal basis that includes the Arab Peace Initiative and the Palestine Liberation Organization platform. Dialogue is complex but must be continued. There are no alternatives to that process. We must recognize that the crisis surrounding Gaza has led to calls to withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative. That is of serious concern to us. The Arab Peace Initiative, with the vigorous support of Russia, has become an integral part of the international legal basis for progress towards genuine peace in the region. It is necessary to ensure that we do not go back on that.

We are making preparations for the Moscow conference, on which there is international consensus, based on the decisions in the Security Council resolutions and of the Quartet. We welcome the fact that Mr. Pascoe referred to that important upcoming forum. We will continue our interaction with the Secretary-General and all other colleagues of the Quartet in preparing the Moscow conference. That forum will provide renewed impetus to the peace process and ensure its comprehensive character. Negotiations must be resumed not only on the Palestinian, but also on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and multilaterally. Only such comprehensive settlement can guarantee the peace and security of all peoples in the region.

Russia is carefully following developments in the situation in Lebanon and political efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to make the June parliamentary elections peaceful and successful. In that regard, we are concerned by the reports from Lebanon of a deterioration in the situation in the Palestinian refugee camps. We remain convinced that we cannot allow the political situation in that country to worsen. The problems of Lebanon must be resolved exclusively through national dialogue and by seeking mutual understanding between political forces in the country. Russia will continue to promote that. We welcome ongoing progress in the development of bilateral relations between Lebanon and Syria. That is another important factor for stability in the region.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): I, too, would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his detailed briefing, and we are grateful that we had the chance to listen to Ambassadors Mansour and Shalev. I wish to align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. I will therefore focus on a few aspects that are of particular importance to Austria.

The briefing by Under-Secretary-General Mr. Pascoe once more underscored the urgency of stabilizing the humanitarian situation of the population of Gaza and the need to ensure an early recovery. The results of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference have demonstrated the international community's readiness to help the people in Gaza to rebuild their lives, but, beyond international support, that task requires immediate and decisive action by the parties.

First and foremost, the populations of southern Israel and Gaza need to see full respect for a permanent ceasefire. We are gravely concerned about the fragility of the current provisional ceasefire and we reiterate our condemnation of indiscriminate rocket attacks. We look to Israel to urgently provide full access for aid workers and materials. We note Israel's commitment to alleviating the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We also note that logistical steps have already been taken to improve the delivery of aid. Unfortunately, supplies continue to be highly insufficient in terms of the quantity and scope of goods allowed into the Gaza Strip.

Recovery and reconstruction efforts can advance only if all crossings are immediately and unconditionally opened for the passage of humanitarian aid and commercial flows, including construction materials essential for the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure, homes, clinics and schools. That and the freedom of movement of people are indispensable for a return of normal economic activity and for a dignified future for the Palestinian people.

Progress towards sustainable peace can only come hand in hand with the reconstruction of Gaza as an integral part of a future Palestinian State and prospects for positive economic and social development for all Palestinians. Moving forward on the path to peace also requires rebuilding trust, including by strengthening respect by all for the rule of

law, human rights and international humanitarian law. We also note the ongoing debate on that question in Israel.

Austria reiterates that all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law, by whomever they may have been committed, must be thoroughly investigated. In that context, we welcome the establishment of the Board of Inquiry by the Secretary-General and await its conclusions with interest.

Since the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), there have been serious setbacks and frustrations. Israelis and Palestinians must steer back, and firmly keep course, towards a just and comprehensive peace. For the Palestinian side, that means speaking with one voice and forming a Government committed to work towards a settlement resulting in a two-State solution, with a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

In conformity with the entire European Union, Austria fully supports the Egyptian reconciliation efforts.

As far as the current and any future leadership of Israel is concerned, we hope to see a greater commitment to peace negotiations as well as to the two-State solution. We expect a halt to all activities that jeopardize a negotiated settlement and the viability of the two-State solution, such as the construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the construction of the separation barrier on occupied Palestinian land — acts that are contrary to international law. An immediate freeze on all settlement activities, including natural growth, and the dismantlement of outposts built since 2001 would re-establish confidence and strengthen the hand of those committed to peace on the Palestinian side.

Looking beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Austria strongly encourages intensified efforts by the parties on all tracks towards a just and comprehensive regional peace, including the early resumption of the Syrian-Israeli track. We welcome the progress achieved in the exchange of ambassadors between Lebanon and Syria. We wish to underline the continued importance of the Arab Peace Initiative to advancing the vision of security, stability and good-neighbourliness for all countries in the region.

Mr. Tiendrébéogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I should like to join preceding speakers in thanking Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his presentation on the situation in the Middle East. I am particularly grateful for the important information with which he provided us.

As the Security Council meets once again to consider the situation in the Middle East, the Palestinian people — especially those in Gaza — continue to dress the wounds of the December war, which claimed numerous victims, particularly civilians, and destroyed major socio-economic infrastructure.

In the context of the intensified humanitarian crisis that resulted, particularly in Gaza, we welcome the mobilization of the international community, which, from the outbreak of the confrontation, spared no effort not only to achieve the cessation of hostilities, but also to come to the aid of the civilian population.

In that context, we welcome the holding of the donors conference on 2 March 2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, which came at the right time to respond to the humanitarian crisis and assist in the rebuilding of devastated Gaza. We must now hope that the commitments undertaken on that occasion will be fulfilled as swiftly as possible. That is all the more important because, unfortunately, the challenges to be met remain numerous and the humanitarian needs very great.

Moreover, the conference was another opportunity for the international community to show the degree to which it can display its concern by being in solidarity with a population in distress. My delegation calls on Israel to join in this overall spirit of solidarity and compassion, in particular by lifting the embargo on Gaza and all restrictions on the movement of goods and persons, which are prerequisites for the resumption of socio-economic activity and the success of reconstruction efforts.

The recent events in Gaza have revealed once again the difficult conditions in which the United Nations and humanitarian organizations intervene in times of conflict. Their work — particularly that of United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — is all the more remarkable and praiseworthy for that reason. Therefore, it is important to continue to support them and to ensure the protection and integrity of their staff and infrastructure. In that regard, we hope that the investigations of the

Board of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General will help to shed light on the attacks carried out against United Nations facilities.

We remain greatly concerned by the many escalations that are further exacerbating tension between Israel and Palestine. We invite the parties to refrain from engaging in extremist rhetoric, which calls into question a number of the significant achievements that have been accomplished, including within the framework of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Also contributing to those escalations is the continued policy of establishing Israeli settlements.

My delegation urges the next Israeli Government to put an end to that policy and to resolutely commit itself to the spirit of the peace process, which, despite difficulties, today still provides us with the best possible prospects for a settlement of the conflict. We should also like to reiterate our appeal to the Palestinian parties to achieve reconciliation and unity. That is why we hope that the inter-Palestinian negotiations currently under way under Egyptian auspices will lead to a Government that unites all Palestinian political sensibilities.

Beyond Gaza and the West Bank, antagonisms are increasingly worsening in the region. We invite all actors to display the utmost restraint in order to create the best possible prospects for the success of the ongoing diplomatic efforts.

In this troubled region, we must welcome the relative calm and stability prevailing in Lebanon. We call on the entire Lebanese political class to continue to abide by the important May 2008 Doha Agreement, and we hope that the June parliamentary elections will be held in optimal conditions of security, transparency and fairness. In order to avoid unnecessary tensions in that country, we wish to stress once again the importance of abiding by resolution 1701 (2006).

The gradual improvement in Syrian-Lebanese relations is another reason for satisfaction. We hope that it will make it possible to resolve outstanding bilateral issues in a consensual and decisive manner.

Finally, returning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we express the hope that the conference at Moscow will be held as soon as possible and that it will help renew the momentum of the Annapolis negotiations. That in turn should, inter alia, lead to the creation of an independent Palestinian State coexisting with Israel in peace and security. However, that will be possible only if the minimal conditions for mutual trust between the parties are created, including an end to the settlement policy, exchanges of prisoners, a lifting of the Gaza blockade, the opening of crossing points, a halt to rocket firings, and inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

For its part, the international community, including the Security Council, must resolutely assist the parties. In other words, if there is to be a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, the contributions of all parties are essential. That is why we invite the United Nations and all States and organizations committed to the process to continue their efforts.

Mr. Quarrey (United Kingdom): I join colleagues in thanking Mr. Pascoe for his briefing this morning, and I also thank the representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

I would like to associate the United Kingdom with the statement to be made later today by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

The situation in Gaza remains of the utmost concern. Little has changed since we last discussed it. The unilateral ceasefires declared by both parties in January are still not underpinned by a proper ceasefire regime. We reiterate our call for both parties to implement in full resolution 1860 (2009).

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains perilous. The United Nations, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is playing a critical role. We urge Israel to allow free and unfettered access for humanitarian aid and materials into Gaza.

We commend the United Nations framework for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. Based on important humanitarian principles that all parties should respect, the framework would allow a broader range of material to enter Gaza in such a way that is monitored to ensure that it reaches only its intended recipients.

Gaza also needs help for reconstruction. We were encouraged by the commitments made at the Sharm el-Sheik conference. The United Kingdom announced that we were making available an additional $44 million to help rebuild schools, homes and hospitals.

That brings the United Kingdom's response to the recent Gaza crisis to roughly $70 million. Sharm el-Sheik also reiterated the need to reopen the Gaza crossings to legitimate trade and the movement of people. We believe that is essential both for the reconstruction effort and the peace process more broadly.

While Israel should reopen the crossings, its concerns about the smuggling of illegal arms and ammunition into Gaza must also be addressed. Egypt continues to have the immediate security responsibility, but the international community could do more. That is one of the reasons why we hosted a meeting in London on 13 March, which agreed a programme of action aimed at enhancing efforts to prevent the smuggling of arms, ammunition and weapons components, in support of resolution 1860 (2009).

As the Permanent Representative of Israel said, we should also recall today the plight of Gilad Shalit, who has now been held by Hamas for over 1,000 days. We regard it as deeply regrettable that negotiations to secure his release appear to have broken down. We were also deeply disturbed by the attempted car bombing at a shopping mall in Haifa. It is particularly horrifying that the device was clearly designed to kill and injure innocent civilians.

The recent Gaza conflict was marked by serious allegations of misconduct by both sides. We welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to set up a board of inquiry and to report on incidents of attacks on United Nations facilities. We also welcome the Israeli Government's decision to undertake their own investigation into allegations against its forces, including, we hope, those that have emerged most recently in the media.

While the Council's focus has rightly been on Gaza in recent months, we should not ignore events in the West Bank. We remain deeply concerned by the increase in settlement activity there, including in East Jerusalem, including threats of house demolitions in the Silwan area adjacent to the Old City and the eviction notices issued to the al-Rawi and Hanoun families. As the British Minister for the Middle East, Mr. Bill Rammell, said on 21 March,

> "These eviction notices are not conducive to peace. We call on the Israeli Government to suspend these eviction notices immediately."

The ongoing problems in Gaza and the West Bank reinforce the need to reinvigorate the Middle East political process. We welcome the recent talks in Cairo aimed at Palestinian reconciliation as a step towards creating the Palestinian unity necessary not only for rebuilding Gaza, but also for holding elections and delivering peace. President Abbas should lead that process, supported by the international community.

We look forward to working with the new Israeli Government towards lasting peace in the region. We hope that new Government will make a strong early statement of its intent to engage in the Middle East peace process, based on the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative. We believe that is the only way to achieve peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Finally, Lebanon's problems too remain unresolved, although there has been some progress, as Mr. Pascoe reported. Ongoing rocket attacks and overflights remain a concern. We would urge all parties to do everything possible to remain calm and make further progress on outstanding issues, including disarmament of militias, securing and delineating the border, and on the status of Ghajar and Sheba'a.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by conveying my gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his presentation and to the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the ambassador of Israel for their statements. I also wish to voice my full support for the statement to be delivered later by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

It is for the States of the region and the international community to see to it that the current transition period in the region allows the laying of the foundations of peace in the Middle East. As the President of our Republic underscored, peace is possible even if it does require painful concessions and genuine political courage.

I wish to address three main points.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, consolidation of the ceasefire, which requires full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), remains a priority. Resolution 1860 (2009) laid out the main parameters for a durable ceasefire, including the re-opening of checkpoints and the setting up of mechanisms to ensure that the

smuggling of arms is stopped. In that regard, we support the Egyptian efforts and call on all parties to move quickly towards an agreement.

France and the European Union are resolved to shoulder all their responsibilities in supporting the full implementation of the resolution. The European Union has declared its readiness to relaunch the EU Border Assistance Mission — EUBAM Rafah — as soon as conditions allow and has studied the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points if security there is guaranteed.

The issue of opening crossing points is decisive to improving the humanitarian situation and to permitting the reconstruction of Gaza to be carried out. In that respect, we welcome the convening of the Sharm el-Sheik conference and the pledges that were announced. It was important that the meeting concerned both Gaza and the entire Palestinian economy. That effort is part of the follow-up to the Paris conference and reminds us that the Palestinian Authority should ensure the administration and ownership of any reconstruction efforts.

There is no military solution to the crisis in Gaza. We have condemned many times, and continue to condemn, the firing of rockets against Israel. We have also condemned Israeli land operations carried out in Gaza and the bombardment by the Israeli army of Palestinian hospitals and premises of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. France recalls that international humanitarian law must be respected everywhere, in all circumstances and by all parties to the conflict. In that context, we supported the decision of the Secretary-General to set up a board of inquiry, and we expect that its conclusions will be presented to the Security Council.

In parallel to efforts mentioned, France continues to support the immediate, unconditional liberation of Gilad Shalit. We support Egyptian mediation efforts and continue to follow discussions under way with great attention.

My second point concerns the stages that must be got through rapidly in order to put the peace process on the right track.

I wish to underscore here, first, the importance of inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Palestinians must be able to speak with a single voice. There will be no peace agreement with only one part of the Palestinian people and no viable Palestinian State without Gaza. Although discussions with a view to inter-Palestinian reconciliation are facing many difficulties, we continue to back the efforts of the Egyptian mediation. We hope that an important step can be taken, in particular in view of the Arab summit in Doha aimed at inter-Palestinian reconciliation. The States of the region, of course, have an important role to play here. When the time is right, we will be ready to work with a Government of national unity that will abide by the fundamental principles of the peace process and will accept to resume negotiations with Israel in order to achieve the two-State solution.

We continue to fully support the Arab Peace Initiative, which should be an essential base for a comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East.

Our expectations are equally high with regard to the new Israeli authorities. Despite repeated unanimous appeals by the international community, settlement activities continue. A wave of destruction of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem has compounded that. As the President of our Republic recalled, the settlements policy, by rendering the prospects for a Palestinian State more difficult, does not contribute to Israeli security, but on the contrary, increases the dangers. In order not to compromise the peace process, Israel must act in a strong manner now, without delay. The settlements policy must be completely frozen, in conformity with all commitments undertaken since the Road Map was adopted.

Furthermore, we support a resumption, as quickly as possible, of talks between Syria and Israel, whose success is necessary for stabilization of the region.

The elements I have just referred to will determine, in this crucial moment for the Middle East, the progress towards the necessary resumption of negotiations with a view to the creation of a viable Palestinian State, secure, independent and democratic, and living in peace side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. Peace must be based on the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community and the Council have an important role to play here. While we are convinced that peace will be negotiated between Israelis and

Palestinians first, France is determined to take or support any useful initiative.

Allow me to conclude by saying a few words on the situation in Lebanon. First, France welcomes the appointment on 24 March 2009 of a Syrian ambassador to Beirut, in conformity with the commitment undertaken by the Syrian and Lebanese heads of State. On the heels of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of embassies and the appointment of the Lebanese ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic, this is an historic step in the normalization of relations between those two countries.

The French authorities also reiterated, on the occasion of the State visit of President Sleiman to Paris, their support for Lebanon and their commitment to the implementation of the Doha agreement, which has enabled the Lebanese people to resume the path of dialogue and national reconciliation. My country hopes that the legislative elections to be held on 7 June 2009 will be carried out in a climate of stability and respect for democratic norms and will facilitate the consolidation of the unity and independence of Lebanon to which we all aspire.

My country also welcomed the establishment, on 1 March 2009, of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, aimed at putting an end to impunity and ensuring that justice prevails in Lebanon. We have also recalled the importance of States continuing to cooperate with the Office of the Prosecutor, as requested in Security Council resolution 1852 (2008).

France remains fully committed to the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). In this regard, we attach special importance to the strengthening of tripartite cooperation in the field under the aegis of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon; the disarmament of militias within the framework of national dialogue; the strict implementation of the arms embargo; and the settlement of the issue of Ghajar. At some point, progress will have to be achieved on the Shaba'a farms issue. We welcome the work carried out by the Secretary-General to that end, and we invite all parties to commit themselves to a genuine diplomatic process.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. We appreciate the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel.

More than two months have passed since the unilateral ceasefires were declared by the respective parties, but the situation in Gaza continues to be a source of serious concern. We call on all parties to make every effort to achieve a durable and effective ceasefire agreement and fully implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The sustained re-opening of the crossing points and the prevention of the illicit trafficking of arms are essential ingredients for an effective ceasefire.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be very serious. Sixty-five per cent of Gazans live below the poverty line and 37 per cent live in extreme poverty. 40,000 people in Gaza remain without access to water through the public network. We must remind ourselves that there has not been much improvement in Gaza. Improved access for humanitarian relief items and the opening of crossings remain a priority concern. We strongly urge Israel to make further efforts to improve the access of goods and humanitarian workers to Gaza.

At the same time, we condemn the sporadic rocket attacks into Israeli territory around the security crossing areas. They have to be stopped immediately. They undermine the security of Israeli citizens, the efforts for reconstruction and the peace process.

We have to realize how important it is mobilize concerted international support to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of Palestinian people. It is heartening that the Sharm el-Sheikh conference in early March succeeded in mobilizing resources of over $4 billion.

For our part, Japan pledged $200 million in assistance to the Palestinian people and will provide assistance to needy citizens in a timely manner. We also support the development of the Palestinian economy through the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. The objective of this initiative is to help the establishment of a Palestinian State. We also make a positive contribution to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians.

To reconstruct Gaza effectively and for the peace process to advance, Palestinian reconciliation is of utmost importance. We urge Palestinian leaders to

redouble their efforts to reconcile as soon as possible. Japan continues to support President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to reunify the West Bank and Gaza.

We are encouraged by the efforts of Arab leaders to create an environment conducive to the advancement of peace in the region as a whole. We are confident that the Arab League summit in Doha, Qatar, will strengthen cooperation among the countries in the region. At the same time, we hope that the incoming Israeli Government will commit itself to the two-State solution and work with the Palestinian Authority to restore the peace process.

We acknowledge that the United Nations, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, has been playing a vital role in the Palestinian territory in the areas of both humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. We would like to reiterate our appreciation for the courageous work of staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) during this difficult period. We also commend the work of the United Nations agencies in supporting the reconstruction efforts of the Palestinian Authority.

The damage and injuries incurred at UNRWA and other United Nations facilities are not acceptable, and such attacks should not be repeated. We appreciate the Secretary-General's intention to report back to the Security Council on the findings by the Board of Inquiry.

We expect a new political development on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. It is essential for all parties to respect and to work towards the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). For that purpose, Israel must freeze settlement activities in accordance with the principles contained in the Road Map.

We firmly believe that peace can be achieved only through dialogue, political commitment and negotiation. For our part, we will continue to make efforts to have a positive influence on the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We also welcome the statements by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and the unilateral cessation of hostilities in the West Bank, a tense calm prevails in the Middle East. The humanitarian crisis brought about by the conflict has not been resolved and continues to pose a threat to the stability of the region. Now more than ever, it is imperative that all of the actors concerned reiterate their commitment to political dialogue, to the peace process and to the establishment of a Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace within secure and recognized borders.

The recent crisis in Gaza has shown once again that weapons will not solve the conflict. Only a few weeks after the partial cessation of hostilities, we note with concern that rocket attacks from Gaza into southern Israel, the most recent of which took place yesterday in Ashkelon, have continued, as have air incursions by the Israel Defense Forces into Gaza. My delegation condemns these acts of violence and once again urges all stakeholders to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law at all times.

In addition to these events, we note that the lack of substantial progress in intra-Palestinian dialogue and the delays in the formation of a new Israeli Government have led to the temporary interruption of the peace process.

We also believe that the continuation of the policy of demolitions and settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank does not bode well for the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority or for the establishment of a lasting peace. We therefore call on the parties to implement as soon as possible the provisions of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), as they contain the elements necessary for the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and renewed dialogue. We must recall here that it is only through the introduction of a monitoring mechanism that a lasting ceasefire will be possible and that an end will be put to illicit arms trafficking into Gaza Strip, which was one of the central issues that brought about the recent crisis. Here, we commend Egypt for having taken steps to facilitate the intra-Palestinian dialogue and establish the basis for an agreement on Gaza. We also commend the international community for its efforts to resolve the

humanitarian crisis and begin reconstruction efforts as soon as possible.

We should redouble our efforts to make progress on the basis of agreements achieved at Sharm el-Sheikh in early March. The outcome of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference was encouraging: it is a starting point for adopting a long-term approach to respond to the humanitarian crisis, taking account of fundamental aspects such as the permanent opening of all border crossings; support for the rebuilding of infrastructure; the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of Gaza; and the strengthening of governance. That collective effort made it possible to obtain pledges totalling nearly $4.5 billion. We trust that those pledges will be translated into concrete action to benefit the civilian population and regional stability.

Mexico is participating in the effort by making a contribution to the World Food Programme, through its Operation Lifeline Gaza, which provides food to those affected by the conflict and promotes school attendance by children. We shall also continue to make an active contribution to the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which acted in an exemplary manner throughout the recent conflict.

My delegation is concerned by the fact that humanitarian work continues to be hindered, in particular in terms of access for humanitarian assistance and materials for rebuilding Gaza. In some cases, we see actions that are clear violations of international humanitarian law. Here, we recall the importance of implementing the provisions of resolution 1502 (2003) regarding the obligation of all parties involved in an armed conflict to comply fully with the rules and principles of international law applicable to them related to the protection of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and its associated personnel, in particular international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law.

We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish a Board of Inquiry to shed light on the attacks on United Nations facilities in Gaza; we await the findings of the Board's investigation and the identification of actions to be taken to prevent further incidents of this kind. We also call on the Government of Israel to support the ongoing investigation — undertaken at its own initiative — regarding possible violations of international humanitarian law during the military operations in Gaza. We hope also that there will be an investigation of alleged human rights violations by Hamas.

Tomorrow will mark 30 years since the signing of the historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. For that model to be reproduced in the region, three objectives must be attained. First, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority should be resumed, with a firm commitment by the parties to constructive dialogue without preconditions. In the present context, meeting that objective depends on progress in the intra-Palestinian dialogue and on the will of the new Government of Israel to support the peace process. Statements to that effect made yesterday by the new Prime Minister seem to be encouraging.

Secondly, there must be a continued commitment by Israel and Lebanon to the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), and the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria must continue. We are pleased to note that, to date, as a result of the Doha agreement of May 2008, calm has prevailed in Lebanon in the preparations for the parliamentary elections to take place in June this year. But we deplore the incidents that took place during the commemoration of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the tragic news of the recent assassination of Kamal Medhat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon.

Thirdly, the indirect contacts between Israel and Syria, in which Turkey has played a key role in the past, must be resumed. In particular, the endeavours of the Special Envoys appointed by the President of the United States will also make it possible to achieve progress on this matter.

In conclusion, I reaffirm my delegation's commitment to continue to support action by the Security Council and interested States with a view to attaining those objectives, while always giving precedence to the contribution that the United Nations should make, in the conviction that stability and security in the Middle East will come about as a result of dialogue and negotiation, not the use of force.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing and by welcoming the Permanent Representative of Israel and the representative of the Palestinian Authority.

The Under-Secretary-General has given us much to consider, and at the outset I would like to discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United States is deeply committed to relieving the immediate suffering of the people there. We are also determined to aggressively work for a lasting peace that provides a stable and prosperous future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Our response to the urgent needs in Gaza, however, cannot be separated from our broader long-term efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace.

To date, my Government has contributed more than $66 million to provide food, water, medicine and shelter for the people of Gaza. At the 2 March donors conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Secretary of State Clinton announced our intention to support the Palestinian Authority and Gaza recovery with up to $900 million in assistance. That pledge, designed in coordination with the Palestinian Authority and to be submitted to the United States Congress, will deliver assistance to the people of Gaza and will further the development of the West Bank.

The United States is working with President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to address critical humanitarian, budgetary, security and infrastructure development needs in Gaza. Direct budget support to the Palestinian Authority offers one of the quickest ways to meet those needs: the Palestinian Authority spends more than 50 per cent of its recurrent budget in Gaza, for instance, and Palestinian Authority employees in Gaza's hospitals and schools continue to provide essential services to the people of Gaza under often extreme conditions.

Through our assistance and support for the Palestinian Authority, we aim to foster the conditions in which a Palestinian State can be created — a State at peace with Israel and its neighbours and accountable to its people, a State of which Palestinians everywhere can be proud. That is the Palestinian State we all envisage and which we all have an obligation to help create.

We are engaging with the Government of Israel on a daily basis about the volume and range of humanitarian items and humanitarian workers entering Gaza. We encourage Israel to make it easier to bring humanitarian goods into Gaza and to ease restrictions on urgently needed items, including critical building supplies. As part of a lasting ceasefire, Gaza's border crossings should be opened to permit a robust flow of aid and commerce, with an appropriate monitoring regime joined by both the international community and the Palestinian Authority. We also share Israel's concern about the fate of Corporal Gilad Shalit and urge his immediate release.

I also wish to express our deep appreciation to President Mubarak and the Government of Egypt for their persistence in promoting a durable ceasefire in Gaza and southern Israel, and in hosting Palestinian reconciliation talks. The United States values Egypt's leadership in the region and its support for peace. We support its efforts to forge a Palestinian unity Government that can be a genuine party to peace and can realize the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations to an independent and viable State by recognizing Israel, renouncing violence and accepting previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

The smuggling of weapons into Gaza and continued rocket attacks by Hamas constitute a serious and immediate threat to regional peace and security, putting innocent lives at risk and threatening to set off another deadly round of violence. Working with our partners in the region and beyond, the United States is committed to moving forward quickly with new mechanisms to block this arms trafficking.

We welcome the programme of action agreed in London on 13 March by nine nations: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. Consistent with existing Security Council resolutions, as well as with counter-terrorism and non-proliferation conventions and regimes, this initiative will strengthen the international community's ability to support a durable ceasefire. It provides a comprehensive platform for enhanced cooperation, information and intelligence sharing, diplomatic engagement and military and law enforcement activities. Participating countries will meet on a regular basis and have agreed that the initiative would be open to others that wish to join.

It is the policy of the United States to move quickly and actively to seek a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. With Special Envoy Mitchell leading our efforts, we are engaged in determined and vigorous diplomacy. Lasting peace requires more than a ceasefire, however. We urge all parties to respect their obligations under the Road Map

and to refrain from any activities that do not help the cause of peace in the Middle East.

We have made clear to Israel that settlement activity is unhelpful, and we call on Israel to dismantle outposts created since March 2001. We also call on the Arab States, building on the Arab Peace Initiative, to reach out to Israel to demonstrate by both word and deed that Israel has a permanent and secure place in the region. The United States will engage to help support the parties as they make progress towards a comprehensive peace between Israel and all its neighbours that respects Israel's rightful place in the community of nations and includes two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

President Obama, Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice have stated their desire for principled and sustained engagement in the Middle East. As President Obama has noted, the United States intends to pursue engagement with all countries of the region, including Syria. On 7 March, United States officials travelled to Damascus to build on previous discussions in Washington, D.C. We are hopeful that Syria can play a constructive role in the region by supporting, for example, Palestinian reconciliation based on commitments undertaken by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a secure and stable Iraq, and free and fair parliamentary elections in Lebanon.

Before closing, let me make several essential points about the situation in Lebanon. Sadly, these are also related to the unremitting threat of violence. The United States condemns the attack on Monday that killed Kamal Medhat, adviser to the PLO's representative in Lebanon, and his bodyguards. We call on all parties to respect the rule of law and renounce the use of violence. My Government supports the Lebanese Government in its efforts to provide security and to ensure that the perpetrators of this attack are brought to justice.

We also remain particularly concerned about Hizbollah's continuing efforts to rearm. In Lebanon as in Gaza, arms smuggling is a continuing threat to peace and security in the region. Lebanese civilians will have real security only when Hizbollah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Fatah al-Intifada and other militias disarm. The Government of Lebanon must be the sole military authority in that country. The United States continues to press all parties to support the conduct of free, fair and transparent parliamentary elections in Lebanon, unmarred by political violence. The shape and composition of Lebanon's next Government should be decided by the Lebanese themselves, for Lebanon and free from outside interference.

Finally, we are encouraged by the 1 March opening of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague, and we are confident that the Tribunal will bring to justice those who financed, planned and perpetrated the assassinations of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and others. The rise of the Tribunal illustrated the shared determination of Lebanon and the international community to end an era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon. The United States will continue to support the Tribunal, and we encourage all those committed to promoting justice in Lebanon to do so as well.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): Allow me to begin by welcoming Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and thanking him for presenting us with an analysis of the challenges that the Middle East region is presently facing. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the Ambassador of Israel and the representative of the Palestinian Authority.

In the aftermath of the violence in Gaza, two priorities deserve our continuing attention: responding to the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of Gaza while keeping the conditions in place for the revitalized peace process to continue as soon as possible. Gaza is facing the enormous challenge of reconstruction. We recognize that there is a continuing need for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian aid and reconstruction material.

Let me underscore our appreciation for the work being undertaken by the United Nations agencies and their personnel on the ground, who continue to work in challenging circumstances. We expect all parties to act responsibly in order to facilitate humanitarian access and the work of those United Nations agencies. However, the diversion and instrumentalization of aid are not acceptable.

We were heartened by the outcome of the recent Sharm el-Sheikh conference, which helped to raise much-needed financial support for the urgent recovery and reconstruction of Gaza and sent a strong message of international solidarity with the population of Gaza. While the pledges exceeded anticipation, the

operationalization of assistance remains a challenge. In order to have a tangible impact on the daily lives of those in need, we hope to see the rapid implementation of the Palestinian National Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, under the Palestinian National Authority. It is needed not only to boost the economy, but also to help heal Palestinian society.

Croatia remains convinced that the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) remains essential in order to avoid earlier patterns of behaviour that led to the latest violence. In parallel with humanitarian assistance and recovery, it is important to secure a prolonged ceasefire. Given the precarious state of calm in Gaza, we condemn all attempts to reignite violence by launching rocket attacks on Israel amid efforts to secure such a durable ceasefire. If there is to be a credible and durable ceasefire, it is essential that the capability of Hamas and other militant groups to launch rocket attacks against Israel be put to an end. Similarly, arrangements for the sustained reopening of crossing points also need to be put in place. Resolution 1860 (2009) is clear on this.

Croatia appreciates the active and dedicated engagement of Egypt to put in place conditions for a durable ceasefire, as well as its efforts to secure intra-Palestinian reconciliation, particularly with a view to securing the long-term recovery and stability of Gaza. We regret that an early agreement to release captured Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit could not be reached.

The recent military hostilities in Gaza only underscore the need to continue to work towards a political solution and a lasting peace in the Middle East based on the two-State solution. We understand that the current period is beset by challenges, given the political uncertainties on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides. This makes it all the more important that the international community, including this Council as well as an active Quartet, remain guided by the objectives reaffirmed in resolution 1850 (2008) and encourage the continuation of negotiations and the reduction of all measures likely to erode confidence. We are encouraged by the early engagement of the new United States administration. We look forward to the forthcoming summit of the League of Arab States to advance intra-Palestinian reconciliation as a step that will advance the overall peace efforts.

On Lebanon, let me convey our satisfaction with the improved, but still fragile, political and security climate in that country. We deplore all attempts to undermine the prevailing atmosphere of calm, including this week's terrorist attack against Mr. Kamal Medhat. The June elections will be not only a key test but also an opportunity to consolidate stability and the constitutional order in Lebanon. We are encouraged by the improvements achieved in Lebanese-Syrian relations, which come at a critical time, and expect to see them translated into further tangible steps towards full normalization.

Developments on the regional front and the support of the region's leaders for peace remain a crucial part of the bigger picture and will inevitably have a bearing on efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace anchored in the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing.

I wish to note that the peace process in the Middle East is experiencing continual reversal. Peace is impossible as a result of Israel's illegal and inhuman practices on several levels. They include its blockades, killings, construction of settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions, erection of barriers and detention of 11,000 Palestinians, including women and children, who have been held not for thousands of days but for thousands of months.

Since mid-2007, Israeli occupying authorities have imposed a suffocating blockade on the Gaza Strip. Palestinians live under very depressing circumstances, which has been met with a very embarrassing silence on the part of the international community. Israel unleashed a war against the residents of Gaza after they had become weary as a result of hunger and the blockade. Despite everything that has transpired, the Israeli authorities are continuing their blockade, placing obstacles in the way of mediation efforts, reneging on their obligations and changing conditions. All of that is part of an effort to perpetuate the siege despite the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and calls by the Secretary-General and many international, regional and civil society organizations.

The occupying Power has committed grave atrocities in the occupied Palestinian territories, in

particular in the Gaza Strip. Many of those violations rise to the level of war crimes and genocide under international law and international humanitarian law. That has been confirmed by numerous distinguished international personalities, including the 16 who addressed a joint letter to the Secretary-General and the members of the Security Council. Reports by Mr. Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Territories, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have all called for investigations into the crimes committed in Gaza. In addition, the Red Cross has condemned the targeting of medical teams and the fact that they have been prevented from reaching the wounded.

All that has been borne out by eyewitness reports and the dramatic articles published in *The New York Times* and *Haaretz* on 22 March 2009, which included witness accounts, documents and information about war crimes and other acts committed in Gaza by Israeli soldiers acting on orders from high in the chain of command calling for the use of phosphorous bombs, the targeting of ambulances and defenceless civilians and the ransacking of houses. The reports also included a statement by a unit leader who deliberately killed a Palestinian woman and her two sons with an automatic rifle, as well as an account of the killing of an old woman crossing a street who posed no threat to Israel's occupying forces. The paper also included statements of how, despite claims made by the Israeli army, pilots deliberately and without warning targeted civilian houses.

It is clear from the testimony of Israeli soldiers that the orders they received essentially told them to show no concern for the lives of Palestinian civilians. An Israeli officer also stated that such orders could not have been issued by a junior field commander; instead they had to come from the highest level of the Israeli army command. One Israeli soldier is quoted as saying,

> "the staff command is responsible for issuing these orders and is trying to manipulate the facts and depict matters as isolated incidents. In fact, they go much deeper than that".

In addition, Israeli soldiers have admitted to killing hundreds of women and children who waved white flags, knowing full well that they were civilians and posed no threat to them. They too confirmed that their actions were carried out on the basis of higher orders. *Haaretz* also published that confirmed information.

The international community must put an end to the suffering of the besieged Palestinian people in Gaza. It must not allow the occupying Power to continue to hold the residents of Gaza hostage. The lifting of the siege must not be linked to any other issue, as it constitutes a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international humanitarian law, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Fourth Geneva Convention and numerous other instruments.

The perpetuation of the siege constitutes an act of blackmail of the besieged that prevents them from receiving food, medicine and shelter. The Israeli authorities must also assume responsibility for the rebuilding of Gaza, without using that as an instrument of political blackmail to the detriment of those affected and whose homes have been destroyed.

The situation in the West Bank is no less grave than that which prevails in the Gaza Strip. A different type of crime is being committed there, namely, that of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians through a systematic campaign to demolish their homes and prevent them from rebuilding and to confiscate land through the building of settlements.

That vicious campaign is focused in particular on the city of Jerusalem, as has been confirmed by a special report by the head of the European Union mission in East Jerusalem that was published in *The Guardian*. It describes the process by which Israel demolishes Arab homes and prevents their inhabitants from rebuilding or even gaining access to their property. That serves not only to hamper the peace process; it also obliterates any chance for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

We reiterate that the unbalanced and biased view of some of the Council's members has only served to encourage Israel's settlement activities. Moreover, the Israeli Peace Now movement, which monitors settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, has stated that Israeli authorities plan to build more than 733,000 housing units in the West Bank. Of those, 15,000 have already been approved. If the remaining units are also approved, the total number of settlers would be double what it is now.

In addition, Israeli authorities have announced that 1,700 homes were demolished in East Jerusalem this year alone. That means the deliberate displacement of 17,000 civilians. In addition, 35 outposts have been established in other areas. Several houses have also been demolished in the historic Selwan district of East Jerusalem to build a city park, displacing 500 Palestinian civilians. That runs counter to the claims of the Israeli authorities, which seek to portray what is happening in Jerusalem as an isolated act committed by extremist groupings while the truth is that the Israeli Government is responsible for the targeting and Judaization of the Old City of Jerusalem in violation of international law, Security Council resolutions and its obligations under the Road Map.

The Israeli Government's practices affirm that Israel's only policy and only firm position for the past six decades have been that it does not seek peace and continues to expand settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and attempts to terrorize and humiliate the Palestinian people and bring them to their knees. These practices show that those who rule Israel are no more than a gang of criminals and that the organizations and States of the international community must make their position clear on the crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. If they fail to do so, they should be considered accomplices to these crimes and co-conspirators against the occupied Palestinian people.

I now resume my duties as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by expressing my appreciation for the excellent and valuable briefing presented by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which the Council is debating today in order to provide the international impetus necessary to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on ending Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories since 1967 and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State.

This debate takes place at a critical juncture when we are plagued by uncertainty about the future of peace on the Palestinian track and the prospects for realizing the two-State solution, which the Security Council has often called for and firmly established through successive resolutions, most recently resolution 1850 (2008), and at a time when the occupying Power persists in its practices, particularly the unlawful settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the continuing siege of the Gaza Strip, and the deprivation of its civilian population of the means of living a decent human life.

The situation in the entire occupied Palestinian territory remains extremely volatile, and the inability of the international community to intervene to protect the Palestinians under occupation exacerbates the gravity of the situation. The Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip is struggling to cope with the humanitarian disaster inflicted upon it by Israeli military aggression and the 20-month siege, while the Palestinian population in the West Bank also continues to suffer as a result of Israel's other grave violations of international law and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. The occupying Power continues to disregard its Road Map obligations to freeze settlement activities and insists on defying the international community's repeated calls to cease its illegal construction and expansion of settlements and its construction of the illegitimate separation wall throughout the West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. The construction of this wall seeks to alter the city's legal status, political character and demographic composition before the beginning of final status negotiations.

The danger of such colonization is not limited to mere violations of international law, United Nations resolutions and Israeli commitments under the Road Map; it also threatens to inflame tension and violence, particularly in view of the proximity of the confiscated Palestinian land in the Arab Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Bustan neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem to the Islamic holy places near there, in addition to the documented danger of the violence of settlers who have targeted the unarmed Palestinian population under the protection of occupation forces.

Also in this connection, the occupying Power uses military force to deny the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem their legitimate right to celebrate their city as the 2009 Capital of Arab Culture, and continues to pursue illegal excavations inside and around the city, threatening the sanctity of the holy Islamic and Christian sites and violating their status as universal heritage sites. The edifice of Al-Aqsa mosque

is endangered as a result of the illegitimate excavations taking place in Bab al-Maghariba, Salwan and Ma'man Allah, the historic Islamic cemetery, with a view to Judaizing the holy city and damaging the unity of the West Bank territories by dissecting it into isolated cantons, thereby undermining the prospects for achieving the two-State solution and fundamentally threatening regional peace and security.

The ongoing severe humanitarian crisis resulting from the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, the lack of a lasting ceasefire and the failure to maintain a calm and sustained opening of the crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, as reiterated in resolution 1860 (2009), increases the gravity of the situation. Egypt seeks the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and resolution ES-10/18 adopted at the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, and has intensified its efforts and contacts to establish calm, achieve a durable ceasefire and open the Gaza crossing points, together with reaching an agreement for the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Egypt is also redoubling its efforts to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation in order to form a new Palestinian unity government under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, based on the Palestine Liberation Organization commitments in favour of the peace process, and to open the way for the immediate reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which, as resolution 1860 (2009) stressed, is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and on which the future Palestinian State should be established.

In this connection, Egypt, which hosted the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza early this month, renews its call for Israel to ensure the immediate, unconditional and sustained reopening of its crossing points with the Gaza Strip in order to allow for the movement of people, goods and reconstruction materials into Gaza, put an end to the continuously escalating humanitarian crisis, and rebuild what was destroyed.

Undoubtedly, if justice is to be achieved, the results of inquiries into the violations committed by Israel during the recent military operations against the Gaza Strip must be handled competently. In this context, we look forward to the results of the investigation by the Board of Inquiry that was dispatched by the Secretary-General to the Gaza Strip to probe incidents of death or injury among United Nations personnel or of damage to United Nations premises during the Israeli aggression. We also look forward to the results of the investigations of these incidents by the committee established by the Human Rights Council for that purpose as well as that of the international fact-finding mission set up by the League of Arab States. There is no doubt that these investigations will bring the full truth to light and clarify the events that occurred in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. As a result, the need to effectively address these incidents will be imposed upon the international community, and the Security Council in particular.

In the framework of addressing the conflict in the Middle East, we cannot ignore or overlook the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) concerning Lebanon. Egypt is gravely concerned about the failure to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) as a result of Israel's continuing occupation of the Lebanese part of the village of Ghajar, its non-cooperation with the Secretary-General's attempts to settle the situation in the area of Shaba'a farms, and its persistent violations of Lebanese airspace and territorial waters. This behaviour has raised tensions that the Security Council has to address as part of its efforts to achieve stability in the Middle East.

The international community has clear obligations regarding the maintenance of peace and security in the Middle East. The obligation to respect and to ensure respect for international law and international humanitarian law in all circumstances cannot be shirked. The situation in the occupied Arab territories must not be an exception. Egypt believes that the Security Council must intensify its efforts to address the grave situation in the occupied Palestinian territory in all its aspects so as to compel the occupying Power to end its violations and to respect its commitments under international law and the resolutions adopted by the Council, as this is the only true way to achieve an environment conducive to real peace.

Egypt also appreciates the effective way in which the United States, under its new Administration, is addressing the questions of peace in the Middle East and a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue based on the two-State solution, the principle of land for

peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008) and the Arab Peace Initiative, which constitute a comprehensive framework for a definitive solution. That would allow a return to the path of peace and lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and an end to the Israeli occupation of Syrian and Lebanese territories. We look forward to the success of those efforts towards a comprehensive settlement.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing.

There are so many war crimes against Gaza and its residents for which Israel is responsible. The irrefutable evidence includes the high number of civilian casualties, targeted hospitals, destroyed schools and property, and the recent testimony of Israeli soldiers who committed atrocities in that war, documented reports of which have been issued by several bodies and non-governmental organizations, as Mr. Pascoe mentioned. I shall return to that topic later.

All those actions are grave violations of international humanitarian law — the rules that govern conduct during war and its outcome, including occupation. Worse still is the fact that Israel has essentially violated the provisions of international law, which governs the conditions for the use of force, always under the pretext that the United Nations Charter, specifically Article 51, gives Member States the right to self-defence in the case of armed aggression until the Security Council takes the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Since Article 51 is an exception to the general rule provided by Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force, we must interpret Article 51 in the narrowest sense. Contrary to that, throughout its history Israel has tried to cover up its aggressive acts by suggesting that Article 51 justifies them.

Allow me to recall how, in the past several years, every time that the security situation has deteriorated in Gaza, Israel has flooded the Council with a series of letters, most recently at the beginning of this month, in which it claims the right to exercise self-defence. It is true that Israel withdrew its troops from the Gaza Strip in 2005, but it has maintained complete control over all its land and sea boundaries and airspace. Thus, from the standpoint of international law, Gaza has remained an occupied land.

Needless to say, the right to self-defence, which Israel invokes to justify its use of force, contradicts the reality of the occupation. That was the opinion of the International Court of Justice in the case on the status of the separation wall. The Court responded to Israel's claim of the right of self-defence by saying that the right cannot also cover threats originating within, rather than outside, the areas under its control.

The right to self-defence also requires the existence of necessity and parity. Those two conditions have never been fulfilled whenever Israel has used force, as noted by the Secretary-General, who has repeatedly condemned Israel's excessive use of force. In fact, international humanitarian law governs all occupied areas. That is the principle established by international law and set out in the Hague Conventions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. When Israel invokes the right to self-defence in Gaza and Lebanon it is in fact engaging in "self-help" by cherrypicking its own rights. Confusing those two principles will only undermine the principle that created the need for an Organization such as the United Nations and, prior to that, the League of Nations. It takes us back to a world controlled by the law of the jungle and the logic of force.

Returning to international humanitarian law, which must govern the relationship between Israel and the areas that it occupies, the principles of that law require the occupying Power to ensure the safety of the population of those areas and the protection of their property.

After briefly enumerating various frequent violations by Israel in that regard, I shall only mention a few examples of the testimony of Israeli soldiers who were invited to Oranim College in Kiryat Tivon to evaluate their experiences in the war in Gaza. As has been mentioned, on 20 March 2009, the Israel newspaper *Haaretz* published a complete transcript of that testimony. For example, one soldier stated that instructions to his unit were, upon entering any house, to start shooting indiscriminately against anyone on the grounds that anyone remaining in Gaza was a terrorist. However, the residents of Gaza were never able to leave because of the blockade. Another soldier reported

how the soldiers wantonly destroyed property. Other soldiers reported how snipers shot at civilians, women and children, without any qualms.

Indeed, we have heard and read that the Israeli army intends to investigate some of those practices, but that does not alter the fact that this is a sample of the conduct of soldiers in an army that the Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, after reviewing those testimonies, still described as "the most moral army in the world". As to the morality of that army's members, I refer to an article by Uri Blau, also published in *Haaretz* on 20 March 2009, in which he described certain drawings and logos that the soldiers had chosen to put on their T-shirts after graduating from training courses or returning from combat duty. Those included an image of a child as a target in the sight of a gun with the logo "The smaller they are — the harder it is", or drawing of a pregnant woman as a target in the sight of a gun with the logo "One shot — two kills" or the image of an Israeli soldier blowing up a mosque or a Palestinian woman weeping at a cemetery. This is merely a small sample of the morality that Mr. Barak talks about.

While Israel was spreading destruction in Gaza, it was also continuing to build the racist separation wall and intensifying settlement activities in the West Bank. As soon as military operations ceased in Gaza, tractors and bulldozers returned to destroying Palestinian houses in occupied Jerusalem in a clear policy aimed at completing the Judaization of the city, and removing its original inhabitants. This is another form of ethnic cleansing carried out by Israel since its establishment.

Another aspect of this policy is the fact that Israel has prevented Palestinians from celebrating Jerusalem as a culture capital for the Arab world. It complements the following statement made by Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of Lebanon, during the debate on a culture of peace in the General Assembly last November:

> "Therefore, Jerusalem, the city of peace, where believers in the monotheistic religions come together, would not realize its historic mission unless the injustice imposed on its sons and on the Palestinian people as a whole is redressed and the occupation is ended." (*A/63/PV.46, p. 16*)

In Lebanon, while my Government reaffirms its commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), Israel continues to procrastinate and to avoid carrying out its obligations under that resolution. It continues to occupy parts of southern Lebanon; to commit daily violations of Lebanese airspace, always under the pretext of self-defence — in yet another example of its misinterpretation of Article 51 of the Charter — and refuse to provide its maps for the cluster bomb strikes that it carried out during its 2006 aggression. The Council knows full well that Israel has not responded to the request of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon concerning a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Ghajar area. With regard to the Shaba'a farms and the Kafr Shuba Hills, we appeal to the Secretary-General to intensify diplomatic efforts to find a solution that will ensure an Israeli withdrawal from these areas.

In closing, we ask only that the Council ensure the full implementation of its resolutions concerning Lebanon, beginning with resolution 1701 (2006). We ask only that the Council ensure the full implementation of its resolutions concerning the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict so that a comprehensive and just solution to this conflict can be found. We have no doubt that the Council is fully aware that every day that the implementation of its resolutions is delayed will not only undermine its credibility, but also increase the risk of crises in our region and the threat to international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.35 p.m.